

Congressman Joe Wilson Presents Export Achievement Certificate to Colite International in West Columbia, South Carolina



Pictured in photo from left to right: Peter Brown, Vice President, Colite; Congressman Joe Wilson, 2nd Congressional District-SC; and Martin Brown, President, Colite

Colite International Recognized for Sales to Central America

Exports are big business for small and mid-sized South Carolina companies. That was the message from Congressman Joe Wilson, 2nd Congressional District-SC, who presented the U.S. Commerce Department's Export Achievement Certificate to South Carolina company Colite International. The award recognizes companies that are business clients of the Commerce Department's U.S. Commercial Service, and that have used their services to make their first export sale or open new foreign markets. The presentation was part of the EXPAND THROUGH TRADE Conference sponsored by Congressman Wilson, the City of Columbia and the S.C. Export Consortium.

"Most jobs in America are created by small companies. Small and mid-sized companies like Colite International comprise almost 97 percent of U.S. exporters," said Congressman Wilson.

After struggling to remain profitable in a competitive industry being transformed by technology, Colite, a 40-year old, family-owned manufacturer of signs located in West Columbia, SC, was sold in 1990 to outside investors. The renamed Colite Sign Group did not fare much better after the sale and collapsed in 1992. That's when two sons of the original owners decided to take matters into their own hands and reestablish the company known today as Colite International. Their hard work and knowledge of the business has paid off and their current list of customers includes companies such as Lucent Technologies, Kroger, Talbots, Tommy Hilfiger, Siemens, AllTell and ExxonMobil. As their domestic customers entered international markets, they needed signage for overseas marketing and Colite International began shipping their signs outside of the U.S. In 1998, Marty Brown, President, and Peter Brown, Vice-President, started exploring the market for the construction and servicing of billboards primarily in Central and Latin America. They participated in a trade mission to Argentina and Chile organized by the Columbia U.S. Export Assistance Center and the Midlands International Trade Association to gather market information. In addition, the company advertised in COMMERCIAL NEWS USA that resulted in numerous inquiries, particularly from Central American countries. They also utilized individualized counseling/assistance from the U.S. Commercial Service posts in Central America and benefited from customized market research prepared for them by the S.C. Export Consortium.

Marty Brown recently reported that the company has now established offices through their sister company, Colite Outdoor, that provide complete servicing of their billboards in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama and Nicaragua and sales from these offices totaled \$1,000,000.00 in 2002. They expect total sales from these operations to reach \$1,800,000.00 this year. Add these markets to existing markets in Europe and Asia where sales come primarily from customized signage for customers and Colite's export activity now represents 25% of total sales. Colite was recognized by the S.C. World Trade Center as the S.C. World Trader of the Year in 2001.

The Columbia U.S. Export Assistance Center is part of the global network of the U.S. Commercial Service, a Commerce Department agency that helps small and medium-sized U.S. businesses sell their products and services globally. The agency's worldwide network includes 105 U.S. Export Assistance Centers throughout the United States and more than 150 international offices. In 2002, the U.S. Commercial Service helped U.S. businesses generate export sales worth more than \$23 billion.

For more information on the U.S. Commercial Service, call the U.S. Export Assistance Center in Columbia at 803-765-5345 or visit their website at www.buyusa.gov/southeast/columbia.